

“America’s Chinese”: Anti-Communism, Citizenship, and Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War

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With the onset of the Cold War, the federal government became concerned with the impact that the status and treatment of Chinese Americans as a racial minority in American society had on perceptions of the United States among populations in the Asian Pacific. As a response, the State Department’s cultural diplomacy campaigns targeting the Pacific Rim used Chinese Americans, including Betty Lee Sung (writer for the Voice of America) and Jade Snow Wong and Dong Kingman (artists who conducted lectures and exhibitions throughout Asia). By doing so, the government legitimated Chinese Americans’ long-standing claims to full citizenship in new and powerful ways. But the terms on which Chinese Americans served as representatives of the nation and the state—as racial minorities and as “Overseas Chinese”—also worked to reproduce their racial otherness and mark them as “non-white” and foreign, thus compromising their gains in social standing.

The federal government of the United States had significant reason to legitimate the place of racial minorities in the American nation during the early years of the Cold War. Racial discrimination in the United States was drawing negative attention from both domestic and international critics, and it stained the image of American democracy at a time when U.S. officials hoped to win the hearts and minds of people around the world. As Mary Dudziak has explained, the federal government sought to “contain and manage the story of race” in the United States as part of its

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goal to contain communism. Through various forms of cultural diplomacy, such as radio programs, lecture tours, and sporting exhibitions, the government emphasized to foreign audiences that the United States stood for justice and equality and that racism was aberrational rather than a normative condition of American society.¹

Recent scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the role of the “Negro Problem” in this Cold War narrative, positing that the federal government viewed American race relations through the “lens of a black/white paradigm.”² While the place of African Americans in U.S. society was indeed the central dilemma for federal policymakers, government officials were also concerned with the impact that the status and treatment of Chinese Americans had on perceptions of the United States, particularly among populations in the Asian Pacific. This unease stemmed from American preoccupation with the containment of Communist China, an anxiety that propelled Asia to the center of Cold War foreign policy by the mid-1950s.³ In this context, the “Overseas Chinese” became a significant target of American cultural diplomacy.⁴ The

1. Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), 250; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997), 177–181; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, 2003).

2. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 14; Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, is a notable exception by including a discussion of the U.S. government’s incorporation of Asian Americans into this Cold War narrative. See Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 240–243. Mary Ting Yi Lui, “Selling the Model Minority Abroad,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Philadelphia, Oct. 11–14, 2007, also examines the role of Asian Americans in Cold War cultural diplomacy.

3. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 36–37, 44.

4. “Overseas Chinese” is the English translation of the Chinese-language term *huaqiao*, an identity promoted by various modern Chinese governments’ members and used to refer to members of the global Chinese diaspora; the term “overseas” is sometimes capitalized, sometimes lower-case. In the mid-twentieth century, members of the U.S. government also used this term in reference to ethnic Chinese residing outside of China. *Huaqiao* is a politically loaded term, however, in that it also denotes loyalty and patriotism to China. As Madeline Hsu has explained, “By connoting loyalties to China’s government on the part of Chinese overseas, who were often only interested in social stability and financial gain, it encouraged the belief of some host-society governments and people that Chinese were perpetual outsiders and therefore politically suspect.” Moreover, “The situation became particularly uncomfortable for Chinese in

U.S. government feared that sizable numbers of ethnic Chinese in the region were especially susceptible to political seduction by Red China. The U.S. State Department, therefore, found it politically expedient to include accounts of successfully assimilated Chinese Americans in Cold War narratives of race in the United States as evidence of the superiority of liberal democracy to communism.

The federal government's political calculus, moreover, spurred State Department officials to employ Chinese American individuals as the channels through which to deliver this message to audiences abroad. Christina Klein has suggested that Cold War geopolitical imperatives for the United States dictated that American elites manufacture a "global imaginary of integration" as a positive counterpoint to what many perceived as a negative ideology of containment rooted in fear. The positive image would stress affective ties between the United States and peoples of the decolonizing Third World.⁵ This article elaborates upon Klein's seminal study of Cold War Orientalism by illustrating how the concepts of both containment and integration impelled the federal government to target Overseas Chinese in cultural diplomacy programs and to seek Chinese American participation in the Voice of America and Exchange of Persons projects in the 1950s.

By utilizing Chinese Americans in Cold War cultural diplomacy as a means to mitigate the influence of Red China in the Asian Pacific, the federal government legitimated their long-standing claims to full citizenship in powerful and highly public ways. But this legitimization had mixed results, compromising Chinese Americans' gains in social standing. Klein has observed, "it was precisely the dual identity—the foreignness—of Chinese Americans that gave them value as Americans in the 1940s and 1950s."⁶ While the evidence presented here bears out her assertion, her work under-emphasizes the ways in which the logic underpinning integrationist imperatives of the period simultaneously justi-

Southeast Asia after World War II as newly established governments tried to gauge the political loyalties of Chinese 'guests' who might adhere to the leadership of communist China." Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, Calif., 2000), 153, 227, note 110. See also Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese: A Study of Peking's Changing Policy, 1949–1970* (Cambridge, U.K., 1972), and Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore, 1991).

5. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 23–24.

6. *Ibid.*, 240.

fied new modes of exclusion. Beyond a celebration of their dual identity in popular culture and diplomatic narratives, the terms on which Chinese Americans served as representatives of the nation and the state during the Cold War—as racial minorities and as Overseas Chinese—also served to propagate their otherness, remarking them as “not-white” and indelibly foreign, even after the ending of the legal regime of Asiatic exclusion.⁷

Comparing Chinese American participation in Cold War cultural diplomacy with African American involvement in similar diplomatic roles helps to elucidate the consequences of this reproduction of difference in the post-Exclusion era. African American artists and athletes were likewise enlisted by the State Department to serve as goodwill ambassadors during the Cold War. As with the Chinese American delegates, Penny Von Eschen has noted, U.S. officials “depend[ed] on the blackness of musicians to legitimize America’s global agendas.” However, a key difference, as Von Eschen highlighted in her examination of the role of jazz in Cold War cultural diplomacy, was that the federal government declared the genre to be “America’s music” and claimed the national identity of black jazz musicians to be “exclusively American.” Thus, the “nurtur[ing] of the development of oppositional transnational and Afro-disaporic sensibilities” by Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and other prominent artists was an unintended consequence of their international tours. As Kevin Gaines has asserted, federal policymakers sought to “delegitimize and discourage transnational solidarities for black Americans” in the 1950s and 1960s, “view[ing] this potential mobilization in solidarity with Africa and anticolonialism as an affront to U.S. foreign policy designs and management of desegregation on its own terms.”⁸

By contrast, State Department officials assumed the identities of Chinese Americans to include a transnational dimension as Overseas Chinese, an association derived from a longer history of

7. From 1875 to 1943 Chinese were subject to a series of legal exclusions limiting or barring them from entry into United States and access to naturalized citizenship. Additionally, Chinese in the United States during the Exclusion Era were subject to severe employment discrimination, residential segregation, and political marginalization. See Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003).

8. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 5, 250, 256; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 179; Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), 24–25.

relations between Chinese in the United States and China. This logic, on the one hand, provided Chinese in the United States with unprecedented opportunities for inclusion during the early Cold War. On the other hand, it ultimately resulted in severe consequences for the entire community in the mid-1950s when federal officials charged that the United States was in danger of being infiltrated by a vast network of Communist Chinese spies entering the country using fraudulent papers. This accusation provided a powerful justification for the state to intensify its surveillance of the Chinatown left and to initiate a concerted and terrifying campaign to police Chinese American immigration.

Chinese in the United States and U.S.-Chinese relations

Since the mid-nineteenth-century beginnings of their immigration to the United States, Chinese in America had been associated with China in the public imagination. To be sure, these migrants created and maintained material transnational connections with their families and communities of origin. Furthermore, Chinese immigrants understood that, as subjects of a relatively weak nation-state, they had little diplomatic recourse through which to counter the myriad legal and social exclusions they faced in the United States. Believing that building a strong, modern China, free from imperial interventions, would lead to their better treatment by the U.S. government and people, Chinese in the United States actively engaged in political events unfolding across the Pacific. Chinese political parties also encouraged their involvement by claiming migrants in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia as Overseas Chinese. Sun Yat-sen, the first provisional president of the Republic of China, for example, hailed Overseas Chinese as “the mother of the [Chinese] Revolution.” As Overseas Chinese, many Chinese in the United States actively supported various factions in China, including Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang (KMT) and Mao Tse-tung’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP), by making financial contributions, staging demonstrations, and publishing party organs.⁹

9. See, for example, L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns: Chinese Politics in the Americas and the 1911 Revolution* (Honolulu, 1990); Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia, 1992); Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American* (Urbana, Ill.,

On another level, the linkages that the American public presumed to exist between China and Chinese in the United States worked to racialize Chinese Americans as perpetual aliens; this understanding served to justify the exclusion of Chinese Americans from the national community through the 1920s.¹⁰ In the 1930s, however, prevailing notions of Chinese immigrants and their offspring as forever foreign began to shift as Americans' views of China itself underwent transformation. Colleen Lye has explained, "The United States' geostrategic interest in Chinese national independence supplied a major condition" for this evolution. As China moved into modernity under the influence of the United States, Americans began to view China with increasing sympathy, constructing it, in Karen Leong's words, as a "demonstration of the promise held by American democracy and culture to transform other nations." The work of figures like best-selling novelist Pearl S. Buck functioned to circulate non-threatening representations of Chinese in Depression-era popular culture. As both countries faced Japan as a common adversary during World War II, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1943 as a symbolic gesture of international friendship toward its Pacific ally. For Chinese Americans, as K. Scott Wong has noted, the war generated "newfound acceptance and stature in American society."¹¹

Even with this radical change in American attitudes, most whites "continued to perceive Chinese Americans as foreigners," during the war and afterwards.¹² Thus, despite increasing recognition of their membership in the national community, Chinese Americans remained tethered to China in the American public's imagination. While Chinese Americans could not break free of this association, the simultaneous existence of a "bad" China (the People's Republic [PRC] on the mainland) and "good" China (Na-

2002). There are a number of English transliterations of the names of Chiang and Mao; I use the Wade-Giles spelling here to reflect the most common usage in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

10. See Lee, *At America's Gates*; Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, 1999).

11. Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley, 2005), 1; Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), 209; K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 71.

12. Leong, *The China Mystique*, 169–170.

tionalist or “Free” China on Taiwan, where Chiang’s KMT was exiled) in the public’s thinking after 1949 meant that Chinese Americans could position themselves as loyal, anti-communist Overseas Chinese.

Conservative Chinatown leaders pursued this strategy to demonstrate support for both the United States and Nationalist China in the Cold War while simultaneously shoring up their power within the Chinese American community. In cooperation with agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the powerful, merchant-dominated umbrella organization known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) launched a nationwide anti-communism campaign. It worked to quash its left-wing, pro-PRC opponents through programs of domestic surveillance, repression, and deportation.¹³ The KMT rewarded this show of loyalty by placing CCBA executives in positions of power within the party and the Nationalist government. This formalization of ties between the Chinatown establishment and Nationalist China thus worked to underscore the identity of Chinese in the United States as Overseas Chinese during the early years of the Cold War. It was in this capacity that Chinese Americans became useful to the State Department’s cultural diplomacy projects.

The Voice of America

With the “loss” of China to Mao Tse-tung in 1949, the State Department turned its attention to ethnic Chinese throughout Asia as a specific target audience for anti-communist propaganda campaigns. One important medium was the Voice of America (VOA), the U.S. government’s international radio broadcasting operation, run under the auspices of the State Department.¹⁴ Upon

13. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) or a similar umbrella organization was found in every American Chinatown. The original CCBA, established in San Francisco in the 1880s, was also known as the Chinese Six Companies. For an overview of the history and organization of the CCBA, see Him Mark Lai, “The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System,” in Him Mark Lai, *Becoming Chinese American: A History of Communities and Institutions* (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2004), 39–76.

14. The Voice of America (VOA) was established in 1942 as part of the Office of War Information (OWI). In 1945 President Harry Truman liquidated the OWI and moved the VOA to the State Department, where it remained until 1953, when it was placed under the direction of the newly established United States Information

learning that the VOA had openings in its Chinese-language unit, second-generation Chinese American Betty Lee Sung applied for a position. After learning that her Chinese-language skills were not advanced enough to meet the demands of the job, VOA administrators instead hired Sung as a feature writer.¹⁵

The editors offered Sung the opportunity to focus on topics of her choice. She suggested a program on the Chinese in the United States. "I was just appalled at the image" that the American public had of Chinese Americans, associating them with "opium dens, tong wars, coolie labor, yellow peril, highbinders, hatchetmen, laundries, waiters, houseboys, slave wages, unassimilable aliens, and so on *ad nauseam*," she recalled. "I decided that I wanted to correct that image."¹⁶ VOA administrators were enthusiastic about her idea because they understood Chinese Americans to be Overseas Chinese—symbolic others within the domestic body politic. As Sung recounted, "'What,' thought the editorial staff, 'would interest the Chinese in China and Southeast Asia more than learning about how their compatriots lived and were treated in a country that represented to them the 'Mountain of Gold,' the 'Land of the Beautiful,' and presently archenemy of the Chinese Communists?'"¹⁷ As a result, Sung began the radio show *Chinese Activities*, a weekly six-minute segment that featured stories about Chinese in the United States. VOA broadcast *Chinese Activities*, first in Mandarin and later in the dialects of Cantonese, Swatow, Amoy, Hakka, and Shanghai, to Chinese audiences throughout the Asian Pacific region.¹⁸ The show enjoyed a positive reception, Sung recalled. "I

Agency. David F. Krugler has noted that the VOA was "the most prominent" of five State Department media/cultural programs aimed at winning allies and discrediting communism worldwide; the others were press and publications, motion pictures, exchange of persons, and overseas libraries. See David F. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945–1953* (Columbia, Mo., 2000).

15. Betty Lee Sung, interview with author, March 23, 2004, New York.

16. *Ibid.*, and telephone conversation with author, April 15, 2003.

17. Betty Lee Sung, *The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York, 1967), 1. *The Story of the Chinese in America* was published in hardback under the title *Mountain of Gold*.

18. VOA Daily Broadcast Content Reports 1950–1955 list *Chinese Activities* as being broadcast in these Chinese dialects. See Voice of America Daily Broadcast Content Reports, Records of the United States Information Agency, Record Group 306, National Archives, College Park, Md. (hereafter VOA Broadcast Reports). *Chinese Activities* was also referred to by State Department officials as *Overseas Chinese Activities in America* and *World-wide Chinese Activities*.

began getting fan mail from all over, where it was broadcast to. Mostly from Southeast Asia, because they jammed the Voice of America in China. So when the fan mail came in, [the editors] said, 'Oh, this is good.' So that they kept it going." She secured her position and served as head writer of *Chinese Activities* from 1949 to 1954.¹⁹

Although employed by the Voice of America, Sung did not consider herself to be producing anti-communist material *per se*. "Well, I wasn't doing propaganda. I was doing what they called 'feature scripts'. . . . If I reported on the events in the Chinese American community or I talked about somebody like I. M. Pei, it had nothing to do [with anti-communism], no political tone. They never told me I couldn't write about this, or that, or the other," she remembered.²⁰ *Chinese Activities*, then, served as a meeting ground for a convergence of interests: that of Sung, whose goal was to portray Chinese Americans in a positive light to counter preexisting negative stereotypes, and that of the federal government, which aimed to represent the United States as a free, democratic society where all peoples, including those of Chinese ancestry, could assimilate and thrive.

Chinese Activities highlighted the accomplishments of individual Chinese Americans, drawing attention to racial minorities' prospects for achievement in the United States as well as affirming their membership in the nation. In February 1952, for instance, VOA aired a profile of architect I. M. Pei; as Sung's script stated: "It always makes us Chinese in America experience great pride when we see that another Chinese has attained success or has accomplished something outstanding." The show extolled Pei as "another example of how the Chinese are making a place for themselves in this country."²¹ The VOA also covered the story of Toy Len Goon, a laundry operator from Portland, Maine, honored as the "American Mother of the Year" in 1952 by the American Mothers Committee of the Golden Rule Foundation. Widowed in 1940, Goon had single-handedly raised and financed the college educations of

19. Sung, interview with author.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Betty Lee Sung, "Architectural Wonders Designed By Chinese Architect," Voice of America *Chinese Activities* radio transcript, Feb. 14, 1952, broadcast Feb. 20 and 24, 1952, folder 16, carton 2, Charles Leong Papers (hereafter Leong Papers), Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

her eight children, who had since become successful professionals. "America, declared Mrs. Goon, is a land of opportunity. . . . Mrs. Goon has honored America. She has set an outstanding example of honesty, industry, and motherly care; and Mrs. Goon has given to her adopted country eight outstanding young American citizens," concluded the feature.²²

In addition to celebrating the achievements of distinguished individuals, the VOA showcased the assimilation of Chinese as a group in the United States. Segments of *Chinese Activities* featuring Hawai'i tellingly reveal an emphasis on successful Chinese integration. The June 1952 show on Hawai'i declared that "achievements" of the Chinese in the islands were "most outstanding." The script recited a list of prominent examples, including businesses owned and operated by "overseas Chinese" and numerous teachers, physicians, dentists, and members of the territorial legislature. *Chinese Activities* next commemorated the one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first sizable group of Chinese to Hawai'i. Persevering through harsh labor conditions in the sugar industry, the early laborers and their descendants had become a "group of wealth and influence. . . . Everywhere that the Chinese have migrated they have earned the respect of all by their hard work, their conscientiousness[,] and their level-headedness." One important measure of Chinese "assimilation and integration" in Hawai'i was intermarriage: "practically everyone you meet has a few drops of Chinese blood in him."²³

Chinese Americans, however, were not completely assimilated into American society; many continued to work and reside in segregated institutions and enclaves. Notably, the VOA presented the existence of ethnic Chinese organizations and Chinatowns as a matter of choice, rather than as a phenomenon rooted in a history of racism. "The Lost Homeland," a segment by Arthur H. Burling for the agency's Chinese Unit, focused on New York's Chinatown. Eschewing questions of racial segregation, Burling emphasized, "of

22. "American Mother of the Year," *Washington Post*, May 5, 1952, p. 2; Mary Ellen Shelton, "Chinese Woman is American Mother of the Year," Voice of America Chinese Unit News Footnote Transcript, May 5, 1952, box 41, VOA Broadcast Reports.

23. Betty Lee Sung, "The Chinese Schools and Newspapers in Hawaii," Voice of America *Chinese Activities* radio transcript, June 2, 1952, broadcast June 4 and 7, 1952, box 43, VOA Broadcast Reports; Sung, "The First Chinese to Hawaii," Voice of America *Chinese Activities* radio transcript, Aug. 18, 1952, box 51, VOA Broadcast Reports.

course there are Chinese who live in every section of New York, as well as in every part of the United States. They are free to live wherever they wish." Those who reside in Chinatown, Burling asserted, "do so by their own desire, because they prefer to live among their own people and to live a Chinese life."²⁴ Similarly, Sung's *Chinese Activities* feature on San Francisco's Tung Wah Chinese Hospital omitted any mention of segregation as a causal factor leading to its establishment in 1900 and focused instead on the initial hesitation of Chinatown residents toward treatment by Western-trained doctors.²⁵

Indeed, as emphasized by the VOA, Chinese Americans maintained cultural and political ties with China as Overseas Chinese even as they professed Americanism and asserted their American identities. The "Lunar New Year" story of February 1953 described the festivities in San Francisco's Chinatown, including a parade whose participants included the city's mayor and "overseas Chinese" members of the U.S. armed forces. The feature included remarks by Paul Louis, chairman of the festival committee, who stated,

We feel that we can point out to the rest of the world that China's glorious old traditions have not died just because of the Communist regime in China. We are asserting a dual faith—faith in the traditions of old China and faith in the freedom of America. And we also give thanks—thanks that we are living in a country where we can observe the old customs.²⁶

As Overseas Chinese, Chinese Americans' ties to China and demonstrations of Americanism were not merely celebratory but also fraught with longing and uncertainty, a situation emphasized by the VOA as a way to criticize communism. The February 1951 feature on "America's Chinese" noted that the majority of Chinese in the United States still hoped to "go home to their families in

24. Arthur H. Burling, "The Lost Homeland," Voice of America Chinese Unit Political Commentary Transcript, June 1, 1951, box 19, VOA Broadcast Reports.

25. Betty Lee Sung, "The Tung Wah Hospital," Voice of America *Chinese Activities* transcript, broadcast Feb. 7 and 11, 1951, box 13, in *ibid.*; Sung, "Wealthy Chinese Donates One Million for Missionary Home," Voice of America *Chinese Activities* transcript, broadcast May 2 and 5, 1951, box 17, in *ibid.* On the history of Tung Wah Hospital, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley, 2001), 211–214.

26. Mary Euyang Loh, "The Lunar New Year," Voice of America Chinese Branch Shanghai Commentary transcript, broadcast Feb. 13 and 16, 1953, VOA Broadcast Reports.

China.” In the wake of the Chinese revolution, however, they found themselves “in an ambiguous situation.” With only “1 percent” of the community “pro-Communist,” claimed the VOA, most Chinese Americans hopefully awaited the overthrow of Mao’s regime.²⁷

“The Lost Homeland” also portrayed Chinese Americans as having ambivalent relationships with communist China. As Overseas Chinese, they continued to consider China their “homeland,” even while being “loyal to America.” Before 1949 the goal of many had been to return home where numerous relatives remained. In the aftermath of the communist revolution, “This dream has vanished, and there is great sadness and homesickness among the people of Chinatown,” who now harbor feelings of “complete despair,” fearing that they “may never see their own country again.” While many Chinese Americans had initially been optimistic about the potential of Mao’s government to modernize China, Burling reported that they quickly became disillusioned after learning of the regime’s many corruptions and totalitarianism, as well as being blackmailed to pay ransom for their family members jailed by the communists.” Given these dire circumstances, then, “American Chinese have appreciated the freedom and opportunity they have found in the United States.”²⁸

Exchange of persons

The State Department’s decision to utilize Chinese Americans in its Cold War narrative of race and democracy in the United States also included sending Chinese Americans on cultural diplomacy tours of Asia in the 1950s. Anti-communism intersected with changing currents of American liberalism and an unprecedented salience of cultural pluralism, providing new opportunities for the legitimization of Chinese American citizenship and important bases for inclusion in the nation in the mid-twentieth century. The rise to prominence of writer and artist Jade Snow Wong, culminating in her selection as the first Chinese American to represent the United States in Asia under the auspices of the Leaders’ and Spe-

27. Helena Kuo, “America’s Chinese,” Voice of America Chinese Unit Feature transcript, Feb. 11, 1951, box 13, in *ibid.* Helena Kuo noted that her story was based on “America’s Chinese,” *Life*, Jan. 8, 1951.

28. Burling, “The Lost Homeland.”

cialists' Exchange program, is one particularly significant example of this.²⁹

For many in the United States, World War II spurred a major shift in understandings of American liberalism as political leaders grappled with the task of defining the values of the nation's democratic system in opposition to Nazism and fascism.³⁰ The ideological battles of the global conflict pressured Americans to improve ethnic and race relations, eradicate racial injustice, and protect the liberties and entitlements of all groups. The war also heightened the relevance of cultural pluralism as not only an acceptable but also a positive, integral, and necessary component of American national identity. Poised to become the leader of the "free world," the United States, liberals argued, needed to demonstrate to the world that its many sub-populations of varying ancestry could co-exist peacefully.³¹ These calls became all the more critical as the

29. Students and scholars of Asian American studies are most familiar with Jade Snow Wong as the author of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the first autobiographical memoir published by a Chinese American woman, and have used it extensively—and rather transparently—as a primary source on experiences of second-generation Chinese Americans in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. (See, for example, Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley, 1995); Sucheng Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender in the Construction of Identities among Second-Generation Chinese Americans, 1880s to 1930s," in K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era* (Philadelphia, 1998), 127–164; Gloria Heyung Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2000). Many Asian American studies works also wrongly identify 1945 as the publication date of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. With the important exception of Klein in *Cold War Orientalism*, scholars have not yet considered to any significant degree the historical context around the publication of Jade Snow Wong's work and the implications of its translation by the State Department into several Asian languages and the State Department's sponsorship of her 1953 lecture and exhibition tour throughout Asia.

30. I borrow from the definition of liberalism from Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1995), 164–170. Broadly, liberalism encompasses beliefs in personal liberty, human progress, and the pursuit of rational self-interest as the basis of a free society. Brinkley identified a shift from "reform" (class-based issues concerned with problems of economy) to "rights"-based liberalism over the course of the New Deal and World War II.

31. Philip Gleason, "Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity," *Review of Politics*, 43 (1981), 482–518; Brinkley, *The End of Reform*; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J., 2004), 231–234.

nation plunged into the Cold War and peoples around the world used race relations to compare the systems of democracy and communism. Racism at home threatened America's legitimacy and its courting of allies abroad.³²

Proponents of this reconfigured liberalism and cultural pluralism worked to include Chinese Americans as assimilable members of the American "nation of nations." These ideas reached the public through such avenues as popular magazines. In 1948, for example, the *Saturday Evening Post* published a story on the Wong Hong family of San Francisco's Chinatown as part of a series of profiles, entitled "How Our People Live," that examined various ethnoracial households in the United States. "In these uneasy days perhaps nothing is more important to the welfare of America than that the diverse religious and racial groups which make up our population learn to live with one another in tolerance and harmony," the editors explained.³³

"Your Neighbors: The Wongs" highlighted the Americanization process of the family, beginning with Wong Hong, a factory owner who had emigrated to the United States in 1903. Over the years, Wong Hong had learned English, converted to Christianity, built up his business, and established a home in San Francisco's Chinatown. Meanwhile, observed author George Sessions Perry, Wong Hong's nine children had become "spiritually enmeshed in the destiny of the United States." Perry noted that this process of assimilation unfolded amidst a continuous engagement with Chinese culture, which served not as a liability but as an asset, contributing to the "nation's strength." Second Oldest Daughter, Jade Lotus, for example, held a position with the civil service; Oldest Son, Blessing From Heaven, performed electrical work for the navy; and Second Oldest Son, Forgiveness from Heaven, had served in the U.S. Army's financial-distribution division in Japan during the post-World War II occupation.³⁴

Perry acknowledged that the Wongs were unusual in terms of "personalities, ambitions, and talents," not only as compared to

32. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 6.

33. George Sessions Perry, "Your Neighbors: The Wongs," *Saturday Evening Post*, Oct. 16, 1948, pp. 24–25, 102, 105–107, 109–110, 112.

34. *Ibid.* A common Chinese custom is to refer to members of families (within the context of the family) not by given names but by family position; the article in the *Saturday Evening Post* followed this practice.

other Chinatown households but also to American families in general. One child in particular stood out: Fifth Oldest Daughter, Jade Snow, who, at the age of twenty-six had already achieved celebrity status. Jade Snow Wong had worked her way through high school and community college, from which she graduated as the highest-ranking woman student in her class. She went on to Oakland's Mills College on scholarship, where she earned her bachelor's degree and a Phi Beta Kappa key in 1942. After graduation, Jade Snow Wong found work at a naval shipyard, where her duties included research on employee issues. A paper she prepared on absenteeism won first place in a statewide essay contest sponsored by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. As part of her prize, she earned the honor of christening a liberty ship during a highly publicized ceremony.³⁵

But even this admirable feat was not her crowning achievement. Since the war, Jade Snow Wong, "backed only by her native abilities and the shadow of a Chinese shoestring," had launched a successful pottery-making business. Her creations were well-received by critics: In 1947 New York's Museum of Modern Art named two of her pieces to its list of 100 Objects of Fine Design, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired some of her works for its permanent collection.³⁶

The *Saturday Evening Post* was not the only publication to link Jade Snow Wong's precocious accomplishments with her cultural background; *Mademoiselle*, for example, recognized her in 1948 with one of its Merit Awards presented annually to ten young women nationwide, noting, "Jade Snow Wong weighs the values in the formal patterns of her Chinese heritage with the enterprise of her American homeland." Nor was the *Post* the first to recognize the potential of presenting a narrative of Jade Snow Wong's upbringing to shore up the ideology of cultural pluralism. In fact, *Post* author Perry borrowed much of his information from her own essays in *Common Ground*, the journal published by the liberal Common Council for American Unity, one of the preeminent non-governmental organizations in the 1940s dedicated to promoting cultural pluralism.³⁷ Her *Common Ground* essays also caught

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. "Mlle Merit Awards," *Mademoiselle*, Jan. 1949, pp. 95–97. Jade Snow Wong's *Common Ground* essays include "Daddy," *Common Ground*, 5 (Winter 1945), 25–29, "Jon," *ibid.*, 6 (Autumn 1945), 39–44, and "The Sanctum of Harmonious Spring," *ibid.*,

the attention of Elizabeth Lawrence, an editor from Harper and Brothers, who then approached Jade Snow Wong about writing her memoirs, which the company published in 1950 as *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.³⁸

Building on—and undoubtedly contributing to—the momentum of her fast-rising art career, the autobiography rapidly became a bestseller. Both the Book of the Month Club and the Christian Herald Family Book Shelf named *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as their selection for November 1950; the Commonwealth Club and Theta Sigma Phi, the American women's journalism honor society, bestowed awards on her the following year. KNBC radio featured *Fifth Chinese Daughter* on its *Cavalcade of America* program, and the *New York Times* lauded the work as “a gravely charming and deeply understanding self-portrait by a brilliant young woman who grew up midway between two cultures,” extracting “the best points of both systems.” These accolades suggest that cultural pluralist ideologies had indeed gained traction during World War II and the early years of the postwar period, resulting in the American public's growing willingness to include Chinese Americans in the national community.³⁹

About a year after the book's initial publication, officials in

8 (Winter 1948), 84–91. On *Common Ground*, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997), 445–452, and Nikhil Pal Singh, “Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy,” *American Quarterly*, 50 (1998), 471–522.

38. Jade Snow Wong, “Growing Up in America Between the Old World and the New,” transcript of speech presented before the American University Club, Hong Kong, Feb. 18, 1953, addendum to American Consulate, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Feb. 26, 1953, 511.903/2-2653, Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives, College Park, Md. (the Department of State's cataloging system uses strings of numbers like 511.903/2-2653; this is the most efficient way for researchers to find particular documents).

39. “Jade Snow Wong Studio” broadside, n/d, folder 26, carton 21, Nancy Wey Papers, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley; “Jade Snow Wong Visits Calcutta,” press release, April 8, 1953, enclosure to American Consulate, Calcutta, India, to Department of State, April 9, 1953, 511.903/4-953, RG 59; “KNBC To Feature Jade Snow Wong Book,” *Chinese Press*, June 15, 1951, p. 8. The transcript of the *Cavalcade of America* segment on *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, written by Robert Soderberg and starring Diana Lynn as Jade Snow Wong, is located in the Dupont Collection, Hagley Library, Wilmington, Delaware. Thanks to Anne Boylan for this reference. Charles Poore, “Books of the Times,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1950, p. 33. (The *New York Times* on December 14, 1950, noted that Charles Poore is incorrectly listed as the author of the review.) On the connections between pluralism, democracy, and nationalism in Cold War discourse, see Singh, “Culture/Wars,” 471–522.

the Department of State recommended that Jade Snow Wong's autobiography be translated and distributed overseas as a means to promote America's liberal democracy among ethnic Chinese minorities throughout Asia. "*Fifth Chinese Daughter* will interest overseas Chinese (who will receive at least two-thirds of the copies published by this post) as a first-hand account of the life of a Chinese-American. In general, it presents a favorable picture of American institutions with which Miss Wang [*sic*] comes into collision in the process of growing up," remarked Walter P. McConaughy, Hong Kong's U.S. Consul General.⁴⁰

McConaughy's views were part of a broader concern among U.S. diplomats in the Asian Pacific over local perceptions of the status and treatment of Chinese in the United States. In February 1952 Hendrik van Oss, the U.S. Consul in Kuala Lumpur, suggested that the State Department's efforts at counteracting communist propaganda that highlighted "anti-Negro incidents in the United States" should not be limited to a focus on African Americans but rather expanded to include "other minority groups into the picture, especially Chinese." The Malayan press, van Oss noted, had given considerable (and presumably negative) attention to the recent case of Sing Sheng, the Chinese immigrant whose proposal to move into a suburban South San Francisco neighborhood was defeated by white area residents.⁴¹ "As the Chinese are our number one target [in Malaya], this subject is of the utmost importance and must be balanced by information showing the other side of the picture," stated van Oss. He proposed that the State Department involve Chinese American organizations in Cold War diplomatic efforts. At the same time, he cautioned, Chinese American groups should be implicated only to a limited extent because the "main

40. American Consulate, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Nov. 30, 1951, 511.46G21/11-3051, RG 59.

41. On the 1952 case of Sing Sheng, a Chinese immigrant whose proposal to move into a suburban South San Francisco neighborhood was defeated by white area residents, see Theresa Mah, "The Limits of Democracy in the Suburbs: Constructing the Middle Class Through Residential Exclusion," in Burton J. Bledstien and Robert D. Johnston, eds., *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*, (New York, 2001), 256–266; Charlotte Brooks, "Sing Sheng vs. Southwood: Residential Integration in Cold War California," *Pacific Historical Review*, 73 (2004), 463–494; and Cindy I-Fen Cheng, "Out of Chinatown and into the Suburbs: Chinese Americans and the Politics of Cultural Citizenship in Early Cold War America," *American Quarterly*, 58 (2006), 1067–1090.

objective” of the State Department “must be to show integration of the many peoples that make up the United States.” Too much emphasis on “the necessity of racial organizations,” he warned, “would not serve our purpose,” which was to “illustrate the way all Americans, regardless of race, ‘play’ together, as well as work together.”⁴²

Given these concerns, the State Department’s interest in Jade Snow Wong extended to an invitation for her to be the first Chinese American to tour Asia under its auspices during the Cold War on a “good will mission.” In February 1952 Consul General McConaughy suggested that the Department of State bring Wong to the Far East to “capitalize on the promotion possibilities of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, which should have a special interest for Overseas Chinese.” McConaughy emphasized that “her trip to this area would create more of an impression than a visit by American writers or lecturers of [the] Caucasian race.”⁴³ Washington officials concurred and approved sponsoring her under the Leaders’ and Specialists’ Exchange Program, a State Department initiative established under the Smith-Mundt Act.⁴⁴ Also known as the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, the objectives of the act were “to enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” through such means as “the interchange of persons, knowledge, and skills.”⁴⁵ The Hong Kong bureau reaffirmed the decision with enthusiasm: “The appearance of a Chinese-American whose artistic achievements have been recognized by the American public would be a much-needed testimonial to the opportunities our society offers to citizens of the so-called ‘minority races.’”⁴⁶

Jade Snow Wong accepted the government’s offer, expressing

42. Hendrik van Oss, American Consul, Kuala Lumpur, to Department of State, Feb. 28, 1952, 511.974/2-2852, RG 59.

43. American Consulate, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Feb. 11, 1952, 511.46g21/2-1152, RG 59; American Consulate, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Feb. 26, 1953, 511.903/2-2653, in *ibid.* See also Operations Memorandum from American Consul General, Hong Kong, to American Consul General, Singapore, Feb. 19, 1952, folder Book Translation, box 1, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 84, National Archives, College Park, Md.

44. Dean Acheson to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers, July 16, 1952, folder Visiting Persons, box 3, in *ibid.*

45. Public Law 402, Jan. 27, 1948.

46. American Consulate, Hong Kong, to Department of State, July 31, 1953, folder Visiting Persons, box 3, RG 84.

her belief that “much could be gained toward American-Oriental unity on an intercultural level” by fostering mutual interest in the “handcrafts” of the United States and Asia. Apparently, she was also fully aware that the State Department had selected her largely for her ancestry. In her second memoir, *No Chinese Stranger*, published in 1975, she noted:

The story of a Chinese female who was able to educate herself and establish a career in the United States created an unexpected impact on foreign readers. Capitalizing on their interest, the State Department wanted to produce the author in the flesh. It would be good for the image of the United States and inspiring to Asians searching for identities in a new postwar era.

She agreed to participate, motivated by “patriotism,” a desire “to contribute towards East-West understanding,” and “a moral obligation to interpret what she knew of the United States to fellow Asians.” Accompanied by her husband Woodrow Ong, she departed from San Francisco in January 1953 for a four-month speaking tour of Asia with forty-six stops throughout Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya (including Singapore), Thailand, Burma, India, and Pakistan.⁴⁷

Faithfully adhering to the agenda of the State Department, Jade Snow Wong’s messages to her audiences throughout Asia celebrated the promises of liberal democracy and cultural pluralism in the United States. “Perhaps if I tell you of my early childhood, which was not so different from that of many other children born to immigrants in America, Asian or otherwise, and how such a beginning could grow into the miracle of standing before you now, I could somehow tell you the truth concerning America as I have known it,” her standard speech declared. As in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, she highlighted the conflicts in her upbringing between the “old world” Chinese values and expectations of her parents, such as patriarchy and conformity, and the “new world” of her Ameri-

47. Jade Snow Wong, conversation with author, March 5, 2003, San Francisco (notes in author’s possession); Jade Snow Wong, *No Chinese Stranger* (New York, 1975), 55. Voice of America Daily Broadcast Content Report for Jan. 14, 1953, lists the following title for the *Chinese Activities* show: “Jade Snow Wong to Make Good-will Tour to Orient.” See box 62, VOA Broadcast Reports. According to State Department records and Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography, she did not go to Taiwan on this trip. A memo circulated by the State Department in July 1952 suggested a two-week stay for her in Taipei. I have not found any evidence about why Taipei was ultimately dropped from the itinerary.

can education, which emphasized “individuality, self-expression, and analytical thought.” She recounted that her time at Mills College “crystallized in me all the undefined urges toward self-expression which had been developing through my pre-college years.” Through her interactions with her professors, she noted that she “learned how to live and think as an American who could return often and happily to the old familiar Chinese world.” Jade Snow Wong emphasized that, through meeting a diverse group of students,

I learned that my background as a Chinese was my particular asset, a point of distinction not to be rejected. I learned never to count on the false comfort of racial discrimination to excuse personal failure. There must be some discrimination whenever human beings live together. How easy it would be to say, “I was discriminated against” instead of “I did not work hard enough.” But the intellectual honesty I learned through my American education would not permit this easy shifting of blame.⁴⁸

Audiences did not receive her words uncritically. At a gathering in Malaya, she later recalled, one man bluntly confronted her with the question: “From your speech, Miss Wong, do you imply that there is no prejudice in the United States?” After a “sudden silence” among the crowd, Jade Snow Wong acknowledged the racism she encountered in the realms of employment and housing, but she also took pains to emphasize that “fear of prejudice and the excuse it offers for personal failure are chronically more damaging to a person of a minority race than to expect the reality of encountering and dealing with prejudice.”⁴⁹

Ironically, both she and State Department officials also noted that various people with whom she came in contact questioned her identity as an authentic Chinese voice, wondering if she had become *too* assimilated to American society. During a press conference in Singapore, Jade Snow Wong recalled that she was subjected to the suspicions of Chinese journalists who questioned whether or not she was “Chinese ‘truly’ (and therefore one of their kind), or Chinese in ‘face’ only (and really an American).” Likewise, Julian Harrington of the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong and Paul W. Frill-

48. Wong, *No Chinese Stranger*, 54–55; Jade Snow Wong, “Growing Up in America Between the Old World and the New.” Excerpts of Wong’s speech are reprinted in Wong, *No Chinese Stranger*, 94–96.

49. *Ibid.*, 81–82.

man of the Hong Kong branch of the U.S. Information Service (USIS) noted the ambivalence and even negativity with which the colony's residents viewed her. First, explained Harrington, Hong Kong Chinese, who saw themselves as "'true' Chinese who through some force of circumstance are living outside China," considered Wong to be a "'white Chinese'—a Chinese who has found it possible to divorce herself from the land of her fathers and take up a new and successful life in the land of her adoption." This "class distinction" prevented Hong Kongers from "feel[ing] proud of Miss Wong as a Chinese girl, and developed into the normal feeling of envy, and even bitterness, for one who has been so successful despite few opportunities." Frillman noted that Jade Snow Wong had been "heckled" by an audience member "who found it impossible to reconcile her genuine modesty in the face of such success with his own failure despite every opportunity." Even Hong Kong's "prominent Chinese who like to think of themselves as fairly important in social circles," observed Harrington, "were even more obvious in their envy for and disapproval of a Chinese-American girl who had succeeded so well in America. No amount of modesty or spirit in Miss Wong could resolve this problem, and situations involving such people were avoided as much as possible."⁵⁰

Even Jade Snow Wong's own State Department hosts registered complaints about her visit. Eugene F. O'Connor, the public affairs officer of the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, declared her visit ineffective, with the exception of favorable publicity in local Chinese-language newspapers. In particular, he claimed that "short-term lecturers are of little or no value to the USIS program in Thailand" because "the impressions [they] manage to leave are

50. *Ibid.*, 74; Paul W. Frillman to Harold Howland, Feb. 19, 1953, folder Visiting Persons, box 3, RG 84; Julian F. Harrington, American Consul General, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Feb. 26, 1953, 511.903/2-2653, RG 59. The United States Information Service (USIS) was the overseas component of the OWI. When the OWI was eliminated in September 1945, the USIS and its functions were transferred to the Department of State. In August 1953 President Dwight Eisenhower created the United States Information Agency (USIA) to direct all information programs previously under the auspices of the Department of State (except for educational exchange programs, which remained under the Department of State). From then on, the United States Information Service continued to be referred to as the USIS in the overseas context and the USIA in the domestic context. This information on the USIA comes from a website that is part of the electronic research collection of historic State Department materials maintained by the federal depository library at the University of Illinois at Chicago; see <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia>, accessed May 2, 2008.

at best only fleetingly favorable, and are never of any depth or lasting importance.” He also stated his displeasure that her competency in Cantonese did not match up to the embassy’s expectations; she refused to utilize an interpreter or to adjust the content of her lectures for audiences who were not “university-level,” thereby limiting the range of people whom she could reach.⁵¹ Thus, despite Jade Snow Wong’s readiness and willingness to deliver messages appropriate to the federal government’s project of Cold War racial diplomacy, State Department officials did not see her tour as an unqualified success, either in terms of explaining personal differences or in terms of providing an effective image of Chinese American citizenship. From the State Department’s perspective, the most useful Chinese American citizen-representative for their Cold War agenda was one who had assimilated and achieved success in the United States, but still retained enough “Chinese” characteristics to be considered “authentic” by Chinese overseas audiences. As State Department personnel came to realize, presumed diasporic ties based on shared ancestry were not enough to achieve their objectives completely. Moreover, they belatedly discovered, individuals who were considered (or considered themselves to be) “authentically” Chinese in the American context might be perceived differently by ethnic Chinese in other diasporic locations where they negotiated unique, historically contingent, and complicated processes of racialization and assimilation.

Nevertheless, State Department officials on the whole dubbed her tour a triumph for Cold War diplomacy. Personnel in Tokyo and Calcutta described her visit as “worthwhile” and “successful,” respectively, while the Hong Kong consulate was “reasonably favorably impressed” with her performance. Singapore’s consul noted that “interest in Miss Wong ran so high in Singapore that the usual

51. Eugene F. O’Connor, Public Affairs Officer, American Embassy, Bangkok, to Department of State, April 8, 1953, 511.903/4-853, RG 59; Robert J. Boylan, American Consul General, Singapore, to Department of State, March 2, 1953, 511.903/3-253, in *ibid.*; Charles M. Urreula, American Consul, Penang, to Department of State, April 2, 1953, 511.903/4-253, in *ibid.*; Olcott H. Deming, First Secretary, American Embassy, Tokyo, to Department of State (also Enclosure 2, Office Memorandum from American Embassy, Tokyo, to American Consulate, Nagoya, Feb. 2, 1953, and Enclosure 3, Office Memorandum from American Embassy, Tokyo, to American Consul General, Kobe, March 5, 1953), March 20, 1953, 511.903/3-2053, in *ibid.*; Wong, *No Chinese Stranger*, 55, 83, 84, 97.

single press conference after her arrival was insufficient.”⁵² Hendrik van Oss in Kuala Lumpur declared that Jade Snow Wong “handled herself well” and therefore served effectively as “living proof of the ability of a Chinese to become integrated into a non-Chinese society.” Details of her itinerary in Malaya provide a sense of how she accomplished her diplomatic mission. Jade Snow Wong appeared before a diverse range of audiences who had been reached through “extensive” publicity, including the Malayan-American Society, the staff of *The Young Malayan* (a periodical that serialized *Fifth Chinese Daughter*),⁵³ the Women’s International Club of Malaya, the Rotary Club, the American Methodist-sponsored Anglo-Chinese School in Malacca, the Anglo-Chinese Girls’ School in Ipoh, the Penang Discussion Group, and the Penang’s Ladies’ Chin Woo Association. In Northern Malaya, Wong delivered nine lectures to a total of 4,350 persons, while 2,800 individuals visited the USIS Library in Penang to see an exhibit of her wares. For those unable to attend Jade Snow Wong’s lectures in person, Radio Malaya broadcast interviews, and educators in Ipoh and Penang requested copies of her speeches for reproduction and distribution. Local press paid considerable and favorable attention to her tour, with the *Straits Echo* publishing the entire text of her speech on “My Chinese and American Career,” and the *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* reiterating her message that, “in America, each community has an independent culture and at the same time can progress and advance with those of other communities without any obstacles.”⁵⁴

More informally, Jade Snow Wong and her husband also

52. Deming, First Secretary, American Embassy, Tokyo, to Department of State, March 20, 1953, 511.903/3-2053, RG 59; John H. Esterline, American Consul/Acting Public Affairs Officer, American Consul, Calcutta, April 9, 1953, 511.903/4-953, in *ibid.*; Harrington, American Consul General, Hong Kong, to Department of State, Feb. 26, 1953, 511.903/2-2653, in *ibid.*; Boylan, American Consul General, Singapore, to Department of State, March 23, 1953, 511.903/3-2353, in *ibid.*

53. Kwok Kian Woon notes that *The Young Malayan*, published in Kuala Lumpur from 1946 to 1957, aimed to “help build up a body of loyal Malayan citizens who would always think of Malaya as their home—whether they happened to be Malays, Chinese, Indians, or any other race.” See Kwok Kian Woon’s entry on “Singapore” in Lynn Pann, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 211.

54. “Miss Jade Snow Wong Arrives in Penang,” *Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, March 10, 1953, Enclosure #5, Urruela, American Consul, Penang, to Department of State, April 2, 1953, 511.903/4-253, RG 59; Jade Snow Wong, “My Chinese and American Career,” speech delivered to the Penang Rotary Club, *Straits Echo*, March 12, 1953, Enclosure #5, Urruela, American Consul, Penang, to Department of State, April 2, 1953, 511.903/4-253, in *ibid.*

“roamed through the Chinese section of Kuala Lumpur,” mingling with local residents. As van Oss noted, “crowds of people approached [Jade Snow Wong and her husband] excitedly and talked at length.” He stressed that “this type of contact . . . is of inestimable value to American-Malaya relations.” Referring to his consulate’s initial suggestion that the State Department deploy an “American Chinese” to Malaya, van Oss concluded, “The success of Miss Wong’s visit indicates clearly that this request has been more than justified. Miss Wong’s life demonstrates the success that Asians can achieve in America. . . . [Her] speech and outlook clearly showed that she is accepted as an American, and this in itself was powerful counteraction to the reports of racial discrimination in America which have received wide publicity here.”⁵⁵

Beyond casting American liberal democracy and race relations in a positive light, van Oss also noted a second and not unrelated means through which Jade Snow Wong’s message could be used to contain communism in Asia. Not only did the federal government wish to diffuse international criticism of racism in American society during the Cold War, it also hoped to encourage the smooth integration of Chinese minorities into host societies like Malaya. During the period of decolonization in Southeast Asia in the 1940s and 1950s, Malaysians feared the political and economic dominance of ethnic Chinese, many of whom comprised a wealthy merchant class. As independence negotiations unfolded, Malaysians opposed the granting of full citizenship rights to ethnic Chinese, codifying this stance in the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948. Discriminatory treatment of Chinese by host societies, American authorities feared, could result in minority Overseas Chinese populations throughout Southeast Asia and the world casting their lot with Communist China. Indeed, since its inception in 1930, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had gained a considerable following among the ethnic Chinese in Malaya. Among the MCP’s objectives were achieving political equality for Chinese. In the view of U.S. officialdom, then, Jade Snow Wong’s “example of a Chinese who has successfully adapted herself to another non-Chinese society” could offer Malayan Chinese an alternative model of non-communist assimilation.⁵⁶

55. Hendrik van Oss, American Consul, Kuala Lumpur, to Department of State, March 20, 1953, 511.973/3-2053, RG 59.

56. *Ibid.* For a brief overview of the history of Chinese in Malaya, see Heng Pek Koon, “Malaysia,” in Pann, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, 172–182.

A State Department representative made this objective clear to her at a briefing when she arrived in Kuala Lumpur. In a letter written to friends in the United States, Jade Snow Wong briefly recounted the historic political and social marginalization of ethnic Chinese in Malaya and the resultant efforts by Nationalist China to “use this citizenship vacuum” in effect to claim the population as citizens of China. “Since it is difficult for them to wrench their loyalty away from China just because it has turned Communist,” she commented, “Communist infiltration and terrorism has been working here, especially directed toward high school level students and teachers.” Thus, “I was informed that America’s interest is to have Malaya emerge a strong nation, divorced from Communist China, somehow with Malays and Chinese cooperating. . . . It was my job to do what I could, in one week, toward American objectives.” Jade Snow Wong reported trying her best to “be all things to all people” over the course of seven “exhausting” days, an effort that earned her the “emphatic approval” of Consul van Oss in his report to Washington.⁵⁷

Jade Snow Wong’s complicity as a Cold Warrior should not be overstated, however, nor should her views of American foreign policy be considered one-dimensional. For example, during her stop in Rangoon, Burma, she claimed, “I skirted myself clear of politics, and simply limited myself to being a girl of Chinese ancestry who had grown up in America, was now traveling as an artist, and the former author of one book which Burmese were reading.” She described with humor the invitations extended to her and her husband by both the Ong and Wong Family Associations, resulting in “confusion and official consternation.” U.S. government representatives in Rangoon took no issue with the former organization, being “pro-KMT,” but after Jade Snow Wong discovered that the chairman of the Wong Association, an educator, used teaching materials supplied by the People’s Republic, the State Department “had another nightmare.” Undeterred, she met with the chairman, only to be presented with the additional request to provide copies of her book for his students. “This, I think, sufficiently indicates Asian interest in American life, even though it seems quite comic,

57. Connie [Constance Wong, a.k.a. Jade Snow Wong], letter to People, March 15, 1953, Hamilton Basso Papers, folder 126, box 4, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. (hereafter Basso Papers). Special thanks to Mary Lui for this reference. See van Oss, American Consul, Kuala Lumpur, to Department of State, March 20, 1953.

when I consider that *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is being distributed in Asia in the hope that the truth about America will counteract Communist propaganda," she mused.⁵⁸

Minor mishaps aside, the observed overall success of her cultural diplomacy influenced the consulate at Kuala Lumpur to request a tour of Asia by a second Chinese American artist, New York-based watercolorist Dong Kingman. As with Jade Snow Wong, the trajectory of Kingman's career as a "self-made man" was portrayed as resolving contradictions between American liberalism and racialized citizenship. In the eyes of State Department officials, Kingman appeared the perfect candidate: a veteran who had worked with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, the father of a son serving with the Marines in Korea, a "very amiable, humble individual," and a "capable speaker" willing to lecture on a variety of topics. Assistant Secretary of State Thruston B. Morton made clear the value of Kingman to the State Department's diplomatic goals: "As a former servant, house boy, and employee in a Chinese laundry he exemplifies the opportunity that our land affords men with talent and ability. As a member of one of America's minority races he will be—in all those countries he visits—living refutation of all the distortions and lies the Communists preach about America's 'mal-treatment' of minority groups." Like Jade Snow Wong, the State Department imagined Kingman's Chinese ancestry to be of particular importance to audiences in the Asian Pacific. "Because he speaks the language of the oriental, because of his unmistakable oriental features, and because of the success he has attained in America," Morton wrote, "what he has to say about this country's aspirations for peace and the dignity of men we believe will gain considerable credence—particularly in those countries of South East Asia and the Far East where everything possible must be done these days to win friends for America and where practitioners of the arts often wield influence and enjoy special prestige."⁵⁹

Kingman's hosts were pleased with the outcome of his visit

58. Connie [Constance Wong, a.k.a. Jade Snow Wong], letter to People, April 18, 1953, folder 126, box 4, Basso Papers.

59. Department of State Instruction No. CA-4330 to American Embassies/Consulates in Copenhagen, Helsinki, London, New Delhi, Oslo, Paris, Reykjavik, and Stockholm, Feb. 12, 1954, folder 032 Kingman, Dong, RG 59; Thruston B. Morton to Representative J. Arthur Younger, April 23[?], 1954, 511.003/4-1954, in *ibid*.

and felt that he had indeed fulfilled the mission of the State Department. During four busy days in Taiwan in May 1954, deemed “quite successful” by the U.S. embassy in Taipei, he lectured at a number of receptions given by local arts and cultural organizations and even demonstrated his techniques during the inauguration ceremony for President Chiang Kai-shek. Two of his paintings of local street scenes in Taiwan were reprinted in *World Today*, the magazine published by USIS Hong Kong for Overseas Chinese readers. “He has made many friends here and the story of his humble beginning and his career as a self-made artist has impressed the people much more than his modern-style paintings,” noted Taipei Embassy staff member K. L. Rankin. “His visit seems to have greatly strengthened the general belief among the local people that the United States is a land of equal opportunity for all.” Hong Kong Consul General Julian F. Harrington underscored the same points, assessing Kingman as an “extremely successful . . . dramatization of how an American citizen of Chinese descent can make a prominent place for himself in American life while retaining some identification with Chinese culture.” He commended the USIS for an “outstanding job” screening films on Kingman, exhibiting his paintings at USIS centers, airing a radio interview, and publishing pictorial articles on Kingman in local periodicals. In summary, Harrington concluded, “we would welcome an increased number of visits by American grantees of Asian ancestry.” He added that, “although such grantees present some possible pitfalls—local Chinese[,] for example[,] are inclined to view with some disdain their more ‘foreignized’ Overseas brethren—they are still living refutation of hostile claims that Asians are maltreated in the United States.”⁶⁰

As with Jade Snow Wong, the narrative of Kingman’s career worked not only to refute charges of racial discrimination in the United States to a global audience, but also to reinforce ideas of cultural pluralism and legitimate Chinese American citizenship on the domestic front. *Life* magazine, for example, printed facsimiles of several of his paintings in 1951, including a scene of New York’s Chinatown, under the title, “Dong Kingman’s U.S.A.” *Life* de-

60. American Embassy, Taipei, to Department of State, June 1, 1954, folder 032 Kingman, Dong, RG 59; American Consul, Hong Kong, to Department of State, July 21, 1954, in *ibid*.

scribed Kingman—"born midway between East and West" in Oakland, California's Chinatown—as an artist whose paintings merged "American scenes" with a "lively Oriental flavor," with "both worlds com[ing] together in cheerful tumult." In February 1955 *Life* called readers' attention to Kingman's tour of the Far East by reproducing thirty-three feet of the forty-foot rice paper scroll he submitted to the State Department as his illustrated report of his stops in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, Thailand, and India. The same month, *American Artist* lauded Kingman's visit, stating: "We cannot think of a better U.S. Ambassador to the people of the East than Dong Kingman. He likes people and with his outgoing spirit, he invites confidence and trust. He has sown the seed for a great harvest of friendship for the U.S." Significantly, *American Artist* did not refer explicitly to Kingman's Chinese ancestry, describing him simply as a "noted American watercolorist."⁶¹

The identities of Chinese Americans recruited by the federal government as cultural diplomats were far from unambiguously American, however, just as the position of Chinese Americans in American society remained tenuous throughout the Cold War. A case in point is the San Francisco Chinese basketball team, selected by the State Department to tour Asia in 1956 under its auspices in conjunction with the Amateur Athletic Union. Established in 1947, the ten-member ensemble boasted an impressive record, winning the National Oriental Tournament in its first two years and placing second in 1949, capturing first place at the California Oriental Championships from 1950 to 1952, and earning the title at the National Oriental Championships from 1952 through 1956.⁶² Despite its exceptional standing among "Oriental" sports clubs in the United States, however, the State Department sought to deflect attention from its racial homogeneity, reflecting an established concern for downplaying the need and existence of such organizations in the United States. Officials in Washington instructed the hosting embassies and consulates that "The team should be billed

61. "Dong Kingman's U.S.A.," *Life*, May 14, 1951, pp. 100–102; "Official Dispatch [A Report to Dept. of State]," in *ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1955, p. 66; "Dong Kingman Ambassador to the People of Asia," *American Artist*, Feb. 1955, pp. 8–9.

62. Team members included Harvey Y. J. Fong, Sherman Fong, Douglas Hom, Chew Jeong, David Ap Lew, Victor Low, George Chew Lum, Donald Fong, Hanson Quock, and Clifford Wong. The team was managed by Marshall Lee and coached by Percy L. Chu.

as the San Francisco Basketball Team. It is composed of American athletes, born and raised in the United States. Team members are all the products of American public education.”⁶³

Yet clearly, to State Department officials, the team members, like Wong and Kingman, were not simply “American”; after all, they were recruited to serve as “personal ambassadors” on the basis of their status as racial minorities and, more specifically, as ethnic Chinese citizens of the United States. Throughout their seven weeks in Asia, during which they played twenty-eight games against local teams and conducted youth clinics in Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Bangkok, team members were seen by spectators as both American and Chinese. “Among local Chinese fans they were known as ‘the American’ team,” reported Richard M. McCarthy, the public affairs officer for Thailand’s embassy. “Besides being American, they are also ‘overseas Chinese’ and their obvious ‘American-ness’ impressed the local Chinese, who could only draw the obvious conclusion that Chinese in the U.S. were accepted and respected, and enjoyed being Americans.” Indeed, Overseas Chinese were the target audience of the team’s visit to Asia, as evidenced by the team’s participation and victory in the Overseas Chinese Presidential Anniversary Cup basketball tournament in Taipei. According to the State Department, the goal of the trip was “to enhance U.S. friendly relations with the overseas Chinese community,” which the team accomplished by garnering favorable publicity in Thai Chinese newspapers, for example.⁶⁴

Still, even as the State Department’s consideration of the members of San Francisco Chinese basketball team as Overseas Chinese served to reproduce their identities as racial others and foreigners, the significance of the team’s tour of Asia for staking a claim to full citizenship and membership in the American na-

63. Department of State Instruction No. CA-2580 to American Embassies/Consulates in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Taipei, and Vientiane, Sept. 20, 1956, folder 032 San Francisco Chinese Basketball Team, RG 59; Department of State Instruction No. CA-2749 to American Embassies/Consulates in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Taipei, Sept. 26, 1956, in *ibid.*; H. K. Wong, “H. K.’s Corner,” *Chinese World*, Dec. 19, 1956, p. 2.

64. Richard M. McCarthy, Public Affairs Officer, American Embassy, Bangkok, to Department of State, March 5, 1957, folder 032 San Francisco Chinese Basketball Team, RG 59; H. K. Wong, “SF Chinese Quint Captures President Cup in Taipeh [*sic*] Tourney,” *Chinese World*, Nov. 17, 1956, p. 2.

tion was not lost on the Chinese American community. Readers of the San Francisco-based newspaper *Chinese World*, for instance, were able to follow closely the goings-on of the club during its time in Asia as columnist H. K. Wong reported on the details of their travel. San Francisco's Chinese Six Companies and the city's Chinese Anti-Communist League honored the young men with a buffet luncheon before their departure in October. A group of Chinatown leaders assembled to greet the team during their stop-over in Honolulu on their way back to California, and the Chinese Six Companies and Anti-Communist League feted them a second time with a welcome home tea, inviting the public to join them in celebrating their "outstanding record" and achievements as "good-will representatives of the U.S.A. and Chinatown on the trip."⁶⁵

Conclusion

The state was not the only entity that stood to gain from the Cold War cultural diplomacy tours of Chinese Americans. Jade Snow Wong, Dong Kingman, and the members of San Francisco's Chinese basketball team profited by gaining acknowledgment and publicity for their artistic and athletic endeavors. Beyond these individual benefits, Chinese America as a whole had its collective citizenship status legitimated in an unprecedented way by the utilization of members of the community to represent the nation as Cold War cultural diplomats. The enthusiasm with which many residents of U.S. Chinatowns celebrated the basketball team's Far East expedition, in contrast to the mixed reception of Jade Snow Wong during her tour, suggests that the State Department's cultural diplomacy efforts were more persuasive to Chinese Americans than to the intended target audience, Chinese overseas in Asia. This outcome can be explained in part by noting that Chinese Ameri-

65. H. K. Wong, "HK's Corner: Ambassador of Sport," in *ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "HK's Corner: Chinatown Newsreel," in *ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1956, p. 2. See also photograph of team on page 3 of Chinese section; H. K. Wong, "HK's Corner: Adlai and Fortune Cookies," in *ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "Formosa Cagers Drop SF Quint 58-49," in *ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "SF Chinese Quint Captures President Cup in Taipei Tourney," in *ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "An \$8 Letter," in *ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "SF Chinese Cagers Break Even With Hong Kong All Stars," in *ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "SF's 'Five Tigers' Cagers Roar To 48-43 Win Over Hong Kong Stars," in *ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1956, p. 2; "SF Chinese Cagers Arrival Delayed," in *ibid.*, Dec. 14, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "HK's Corner," in *ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1956, p. 2; H. K. Wong, "HK's Corner: Tea For Local Five," in *ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1956, p. 2.

cans stood to gain in immediate ways from this project, as evident from the embrace of Kingman's ambassadorship by the popular press, for instance. Chinese Americans understood well the opportunities presented to them by the ascendance of anti-communism as the defining paradigm of U.S. foreign policy to buttress their claims to full citizenship and participation in American society.

At the same time, however, the terms on which Chinese Americans engaged in Cold War cultural diplomacy reproduced their differences as racial minorities. In the cases of Jade Snow Wong and Dong Kingman, the focus on their achievements during their tours—which Jade Snow Wong herself acknowledged was not a “typical story” of Chinese in America—did not address or hold the state accountable for continuing racism and discrimination against racial minorities in the United States. The exceptionalism of their careers actually underscored the racial limits of liberalism and assimilation in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, since so few Chinese Americans had achieved their levels of success.

In addition, the State Department's rationale for recruiting Chinese Americans as Overseas Chinese also re-marked them as foreign, bringing into question their national identities by operating on the assumption that these identities always transcended the borders of the United States through their supposed ties to China and other Chinese diasporic communities. This imagined relationship to China, reinforced by the logic of Cold War cultural diplomacy, ultimately placed Chinese American citizenship in a precarious position as the hegemony of anti-communism in American politics showed no signs of dissipating. The vulnerability of the community was made clear in 1956 when the federal government instigated a crackdown on illegal Chinese immigration. The manner in which state agencies and officials proceeded to address this issue—alleging that all Chinese entering the United States were potential spies for Communist China, issuing mass subpoenas, and conducting grand jury investigations of Chinatown organizations—placed all Chinese in the United States under a cloud of suspicion. This atmosphere led to devastating outcomes for many individuals and families who were subject to private torment, public shame, prosecution, and deportation.⁶⁶

66. See Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940–1965* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002); Him Mark Lai, “Aftermath to Exclusion: The Confession Program,” in Lai, *Becoming Chinese American*; and Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

Although leftists were disproportionately targeted and harassed by government agents, no Chinese Americans, regardless of political persuasion, were immune from the negative consequences of racialization as perpetual foreigners. The repercussions of the federal investigation, then, illustrates how the “dual identities” of Chinese Americans noted by Klein served not only to undergird their integration into the nation but also worked at the same time to rationalize new modes of exclusion. Indeed, the processes of negotiating their collective citizenship status transpired on uncertain, ambiguous ground, even as Chinese in the United States made significant gains in social standing during the early years of the Cold War.⁶⁷

67. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 240.